



Social Distance And Service Delivery In Rural Communities – The Case Of Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:- Rural communities in Nigeria suffer untold hardship and neglect as a result of dearth of service delivery by the local government executives in the country. The study looked at challenges of lack of service delivery with a view to ascertaining why it is so. Both secondary and primary sources of data collection were applied. It was discovered that the major factors that contribute to rural neglect and poor service delivery in the country are social distance and non-residence of local government executives and their administrative crew in their areas of operation. The study recommended that the barriers posed by social distance which culminates in non-interaction and non-integration with the rural communities should be reduced appreciably and that residing at the local government headquarters made a pre-requisite for every aspiring chairman and his officers.

Keywords:- Service delivery, social distance, local government executives, Enugu State

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is richly endowed with human and natural resources (including oil and gas, rich agricultural lands, mineral deposits of assorted types), good climate, friendly weather and low incidence of natural disasters. It is the most populous country in Africa with a population approaching one hundred and sixty million people (National Population Commission, Abuja, 2006 projected to 2012). In spite of these natural endowments Nigeria's economy has continued to be dominated by the primary production sector with peasant Agriculture leading the economy with about 40% of the GDP, followed by crude oil which is about 22% (NEEDS, 2004). It is a country with extreme paradoxes, wallowing in abject poverty in the midst of plenty.

The local government system in Nigeria is established to take care of the social, health, and infrastructure needs of the people at the grass roots, i.e., rural communities. It is the third tier of government in Nigeria and the 1999 constitution elevated it to an autonomous and legal entity. The official hand book on the reformed local government system in Nigeria 1976 states that: "local government is government at the local level exercised through a representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas; these powers provide council with substantial control over local government affairs".

The councils are empowered by the above provision to initiate and direct the provision of services and determine and implement projects. Other activities are intended to complement the activities of the state and federal governments in some areas and encourage local initiatives, and to respond to local needs and conditions that demand the devolution of governmental functions and for active participation of the people and traditional institutions (Guideline for Local Government Reform in Nigeria, Fed. Govt. of Nigeria, Abuja, 1976).

The role of the local government council in service delivery of the rural communities cannot be over emphasized in the Nigerian context. The essence of creating and establishing the local government system is to ensure rural development via service delivery in Nigeria's rural communities. By constitutional design, the federal and state tiers of administration are distal to the rural or grass root areas, the most distant being the federal followed by the state. Some amenities meant to serve the rural communities are meant to pass indirectly from the federal through the state and local government, while others may come direct from the federal government. Those that are meant to come directly to rural communities are catered for through the federal allocations dispensed to the chairmen of local government councils. The amenities that come indirectly through state tier of administration are provided in the federal allocations to state governments who in turn discharge these services to the rural communities either directly or in collaboration with the local governments. By implication the federal administration are distant from the rural communities and are not expected to be locally

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present at the rural communities except through the services of some federal officers who in turn may have their offices mainly at the state capitals. State governments by set up have commissioners who are supposed to be discharging their duties to the benefit of the urban and rural areas and these commissioners and special assistants reside at the state headquarters. State and federal administrations may execute projects in rural areas, but the efficacy of the implementation of these projects is problematic owing to the poor project monitoring and physical presence often associated with distance. Eliminating this difficulty informed the decision of the federal government to enact the Local Government Act of 1976 with the purpose to address the seeming lapse and bring the federal and state administrative concerns indirectly very close to the populace. The third tier of administration which is the local government is constitutionally designed to be domiciled in each local administrative unit of the federation whether in the urban or rural areas. Over 70% of the local administrative units in Nigeria are in the rural areas. But the question is: are the officers of the local governments near enough to their areas of operation for effective administration and implementation of planned projects? How close are the local governments in Nigeria to the people they are fashioned to administer?

Interestingly, the document on the local government administration in Nigeria did not specify the manner of physical presence of the authorities to effect the service delivery and be part of the service benefaction. The physical presence and abode of the top personnel in the local government administration in their areas of operation would engender the bringing of government closer to the people and participation in local governance. It would also help them to determine what goods and services they needed and could be achieved. By this arrangement the local government officials are expected to reside among the people in the rural communities in order to appreciate their problems and also share in their aspirations.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Service delivery in Nigeria appears to be a stubborn and unresolved issue. There has been a plethora of developmental policies and programmes aimed at improving the living conditions of the rural dwellers through service delivery, but it does appear that not much has been achieved. Many reasons have been adduced for the dearth of service delivery in the rural areas by many scholars. The questions that agitate the mind are:

- a) What is the level of interaction and integration between the local government executives and the people living in the rural areas?
- b) How many of these local government executives reside in their area of operation and how far do they impact on the people concerned?

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent of service delivery to the rural communities by the local government executives in Enugu state given the size of the budgetary allocations that are made available to them from both federal and state governments.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Elite theory is all about the rulers and the ruled. "Elite" is a collective noun for those who occupy the choicest part of a society or the positions of superiority and authority within a society or group by virtue of qualities or qualifications (actual, claimed, or presumed) of excellence or distinction (Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary; Asogwa and Omenma, 2001:136).

The elites could therefore be seen as the rich, powerful, intelligent and influential group in a society. The group exerts considerable influence and pressure on the masses; they constitute the minority few that rule the rest of the masses. The proponents of the elite theory include Mosca (1939), Michel (1949), Pareto (1959), and Aron (1959). Elitism cuts across all spheres of life. For example, there are military, intellectual, business, and political elites. The political elites appear to be very subjective in their attitude to governance and because of this they are more vociferous in political, democratic dispensation. The elitist system is dominated by the powerful few whether in social, political, religious, business, public military order. It also views politics as a minority affair precluding the majority from active participation. In a way the above scenario reflects the relationship between local government executives and the rural dwellers/communities in Enugu state. The relevance of the theory as it concerns social distance and service delivery in rural communities is that the executive chairmen and their executives are the elites that rule the masses of the rural communities. These elites are hardly close to the non elites (rural dwellers). The opinions, views, and the needs of the masses are neither sought nor appreciated by them (elites) who find it difficult to relate, interact, or integrate with the masses that voted them into office. It is a situation of "we" and "they" between the L.G. executives (elites) and the communities governed.

IV. SOCIAL DISTANCE

Social distance describes the distance between the different groups of a society. Social class, ethnicity, living standards, culture, etc, constitute distances by which the groups do not mix. Social distance can be

conceptualized in different ways or dimensions. These dimensions however do not overlap because members of two different groups can interact freely yet they are not close to each other. In a sociological framework, social distance is conceptualized into three different dimensions, viz, the affective, the normative, and the interactive social distance.

V. AFFECTIVE SOCIAL DISTANCE

In the affective perspective, social distance is viewed from how much or little sympathy the members of a group interact or feel for those of other groups. This approach was highlighted by Emory Bogardus (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/social_distance). His studies on social distance were based on the feeling and reactions of persons toward other persons or groups.

Normative Social Distance

The normative social distance refers to the widely accepted and often consciously expressed norm about who should be considered an "insider" and an "outsider" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/social_distance). This dimension of social distance differs from the affective because it is not subjective and it specifies the distinction between "us" and "them" or "we" and "they".

Interactive Social Distance

This is the aspect of social distance that focuses on the frequency and intensity of interactions between two groups. It provides that the more the members of two groups interact, the closer they are socially. This approach falls within the purview of the theory that the frequency of interaction between two parties is used as a measure of the "strength" of the social ties and cohesion between them.

From the above theoretical foray, it can be seen that the three dimensions of the sociological approach to social distance are inter-related and relevant to the topic under discourse. While the affective is centered on the feelings of persons toward a group, the normative focuses on the non subjective and structural aspects of social relation and the interactive on the effect of frequency of interaction on group's strength, social tie and cohesion. We should note that the main reason for creating and establishing local administration is to bring governance closer to the people and for grass root participation in their political and administrative affairs. One should also recall that the absence of close interaction and participation in governance was one of the main flaws of the colonial administration in Nigeria. The fact that the local government executives and their officers engage in social distancing by operating from the far cities and not residing in their areas of operation with their subjects defeats the aim of local government administration as the third tier of government. This greatly occasions the poor service delivery that is experienced in the rural communities of Enugu state in particular and Nigeria in general.

Rural Neglect And The Local Government System

The dilemma of inept leadership and bad governance has taken the centre page in the academic and political/administrative discourse in Nigeria over the years. It is no news that Nigeria is endowed with rich human and material resources. Yet the country still ranks among the poorest in the world. It is expected that inhabitants of every locality in Nigeria should have access to social amenities to better their living conditions given the nature and system of governance in the country. To the contrary, the country is afflicted with gross underdevelopment and dearth of social services delivery. Nkon (2000:74) and Okaba (2005:234) opined that: "...Nigeria is the most populous African nation and the most richly endowed in natural resources but yet ranks amongst the 25 most wretched countries in the universe. It is currently afflicted by "man made" mass poverty, alarming unemployment rate, declining quality of education, health and other social amenities, crippling internal and external debt burden, inter and intra-ethnic religious crises and other vices..."

Rural communities harbor majority of Nigerians and they produce food for the teeming population; in addition all of the country's major revenue sources including oil and gas, and rich agricultural produce as well as mineral deposits are found in the rural areas and, in spite of these, the rural places record the most decay and negligence in infrastructure and social services condition. According to Okaba (2005:235): "*The rural areas that constitute seventy percent (70 %) of the national population, the source of over 80% of Nigeria's food supply, and the environment that plays host to over 90% of oil (Nigeria's black gold) exploration are denied access to basic necessities of life, namely, drinking water, education, health, shelter, hygiene, electricity, transport and communication; the rural dwellers suffer economic exploitation, social neglect, political alienation and marginalization, and environmental degradation.*"

In his own contribution, Ekpenyong (1992:46) noted that the phenomenon of rural neglect and disempowerment, which are as a result of dearth of service delivery, are attributed to the British colonial administration in Nigeria. He argued that the colonial regime promoted an urban based development policy, and that socio-economic amenities and infrastructure were provided only in towns and cities where the government

had economic interest. Thus, the post-independence development plan toed the same colonial path: emphasis being placed on industrializing the cities, and providing the urban cities with more social services, infrastructure and business opportunities. Lawal (2000:16, as cited by Okaba, 2005) ascribed the paucity of service delivery in the rural areas to lack of interest, on the part of the local government, in projects that would not benefit the Chairman and his administrative team.

The challenges of corruption, inept leadership, bad governance, lack of qualified personnel, lack of patriotism, negligence of duty, and political interference, among other weak points have been identified as factors that inhibit good service delivery in Nigeria. The fact that government allows the Executive Chairman, the councilors, and the administrative staff to come periodically from where they reside in the State capitals and other urban towns outside their stations to run their local governments will continue to prolong unabated, the present unsatisfactory service delivery in the rural communities.

Residential And Socio-Economic Status Of The Local Government Administrators In Enugu State

In Enugu State all the Chairmen (except one), many councilors and top administrative officers and heads of departments and units are known to be either residing in Enugu city or in other towns distant enough from the L. G. areas where they are operate. In Table 1.0 is the present study report on the residencies and (original) occupation status of the 17 Local government chief executives in Enugu State from 2007 to date. The major highpoint in Table 1.0 is that almost all the local government chairmen reside in Enugu city. This non-residence of the top officers in their designated local council areas has been identified in this study as one of the major factors militating against effective and efficient service delivery in the rural localities of Enugu State.

Table 1.0: The Present Residence and Pre-appointment Occupation Standings of the Chairmen of the Local Government Areas in Enugu State

S/n	L.G.A.	Residence	Occupation
1.	Igbo Etiti	Enugu	Politician
2.	Igbo Eze N.	Enugu	S.A. to Hon Commissioner
3.	Igbo Eze S.	Enugu	Politician
4.	Nsukka	Nsukka	Businessman
5.	Udenu	Enugu	Vet Doc, Min. of Agric, Enugu
6.	Uzo Uwani	Enugu	Former Commissioner
7.	Isi Uzo	Enugu	University Lecturer
8.	Nkanu East	Enugu	Practicing Animal Scientist
9.	Nkanu West	Enugu	Politician
10.	Enugu East	Enugu	Politician
11.	Enugu S.	Enugu	Politician
12.	Oji River	Enugu	Politician
13.	Udi	Enugu	Aba-based Businessman
14.	Awgu	Enugu	Politician
15.	Aninri	Enugu	Politician
16.	Ezeagu	Enugu	Politician
17.	Enugu N.	Enugu	Politician

Source: Field Survey, October 2010.

Such a factor portends a far reaching stultification of the policy objectives (as provided in the national constitution) aimed at obtaining an effective administration of the local areas (outside the urban segment) of the country. The reason being that the present shuttle practice (or “periodic visits”) by council officers has incessantly leashed adverse negligent effects on the social, economic, health and infrastructure service delivery in the rural areas. The local government reform of 1976 gave reasonable legal autonomy and mandate to the third tier of administration to compliment the efforts of the federal and State governments in the governance of the rural or local areas, thereby ensuring a holistic development of the entire country. The 1999 constitution also lends its endorsement to the creation of the third tier level of governance as a vehicle to bridge the gap between urban and rural dwelling areas in the provision of social amenities and infrastructure.

Ezeani (2006:258) outlined that local governments were instituted to provide services and they must be judged by their success in doing so up to the standard measured by a national inspectorate. He argued that because the local governments are closer to the local areas they can provide certain services faster and far more efficiently than the Federal or State government. Olowu (1991) and Ezeani (2004:40) were emphatic that the local government system, particularly in developing countries, should be seen as a veritable instrument for rural development. Taking a cursory look at the provisions governing the creation of local governments, their

structure, and functions and funding, one would understand that the major reason for their creation is to take governance to the rural areas with a view to enhancing political participation and local initiative for accelerated development. These intentions have seemed unrealizable because the chief executives and their administrative team operate in near-absentia by shuttling on staggered time periods weekly or bi-weekly from their big-city dwellings where standard facilities and amenities obtain.

Impact on Service Delivery

Given the status (shown in Table 1.0) there is bound to be a general lack of activity and performance including a high rate of truancy among the rest of the local council staff workers in the absence of regular supervision by the truant superior officers. As expected, most of the L. G. headquarters, where all workers are supposed to man their daily duty posts each working week, remain like “ghost areas” except on the monthly pay days. What is the impact? How does this lapse affect effective administration and service delivery utilizing public funds? The 1999 constitution, section 7(6) provides that: “*the National Assembly shall make provisions for statutory allocations of public revenue to local councils in the federation; and (b) the houses of assembly of states shall make provision for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils within the state*”. In accordance with this requirement, the 17 Local Government Areas in Enugu state received a total allocation of N58.12 billion from May 2007 to December 2009. The statutory allocations and summaries of income and expenditure profiles of all affected local government councils are as presented in Tables 2.0 and 3.0. With all the statutory allocations and the internally generated funds that accrued to the local councils in Enugu State in particular and Nigeria in general, social amenities and infrastructure facilities were hardly provided in the rural communities. In Enugu State, for example, the 17 LGA’s made a paltry expenditure of N13.49 billion (46.39%) out of a total revenue of N29.08 billion. Meaning that little attention was paid to providing adequate social amenities and infrastructure to their council areas for which the funds were allocated. If there was a constitutional requirement that whoever wishes to become Chairman of a local government imperatively has to reside at the Headquarters of the L.G.A or at least within his/her council area, the poor service delivery witnessed would be minimal. This is because the chief executives together with their officers and law makers would be physically present most of the time; the officers would be involved and/or affected by the activities and resulting service delivery going on including the people’s feedback reactions. As a result the following are bound to happen in the areas:

- a). Improving the numbers and adequacy of the schools established, and, hence striving at ensuring quality education of the children.
- b). Raising the state of the primary and secondary health institutions in the area for improved health and living welfare of the people.
- c). Increasing the level of participation of all the workers with regard to diligence, commitment and qualitative output as a result of constant supervision and job appraisal by the superior officers continually present.

Table 2.0: Enugu State Nigeria Statutory Allocations To The Local Governments (N’000) From May 2007- Dec. 2009

Sn	L.g. A.	May- dec 2007	Jan.-dec 2008	Jan-dec. 2009	Total to dec.,2009
1.	Aninri	654,363	1,612,408	847,241	3,114,012
2.	Awgu	708,486	1,597,802	1,018,412	3,324,700
3.	Enugu east	764,753	1,974,079	1,183,827	3,922,659
4.	Enugu north	709,426	1,805,052	978,964	3,493,443
5.	Enugu south	744,588	1,715,460	1,041,734	3,501,782
6.	Ezeagu	679,872	1,642,279	998,103	3,320,254
7.	Igbo-etiti	722,774	1,772,234	1,079,178	3,574,186
8.	Igbo-eze north	752,342	1,930,081	1,180,877	3,863,300
9.	Igbo-eze south	557,913	1,486,053	980,418	3,024,384
10.	Isi-uzo	657,834	1,520,369	955,297	3,133,500
11.	Nkanu east	637,889	1,569,389	953,322	3,160,600
12.	Nkanu west	618,108	1,513,490	921,338	3,052,936
13.	Nsukka	895,093	1,989,744	1,271,479	4,156,316
14.	Oji river	610,683	1,515,187	920,557	3,046,427
15.	Udenu	649,409	1,653,398	1,014,326	3,317,133
16.	Udi	770,540	1,843,095	1,421,549	4,035,184
17.	Uzo uwani	612,472	1,547,503	915,340	3,075,315
	Total, all lga’s	11,746,545	28,687,623	17,681,962	
	Grand total				58,116,130

Explanatory Note:

- (i) The Federal statutory allocations to the LGA'S from May – Dec. 2007 totaled N11.75 billion.
- (ii) From January-Dec. in 2008 the allocations to the LGA'S totaled N28.69 billion.
- (iii) Between Jan. and Dec. 2009 the allocations to the LGA'S totaled N17.68 billion.
- (iv) The grand total of all allocations from May 2007-Dec. 2009 was N58.12 billion.

Source of data:

(a) Federal Ministry of Finance, Abuja; (b) Onwa Newspaper (onwaeye@gmail.com/april 2010).

TABLE 3.0: Summaries Of Income And Expenditure Profiles Of All 17 L.G.A.'S In Enugu State In Year 2008 ('000)

S/N (AS IN TABLE 2.0)	STATUTOR Y ALLOCATIO N (A)	RECUR. REVENUE INCLUDIN G IGR, ETC. (B)	TOTAL REVENUE (A+B) (C)	CAPITAL EXPEND- ITURE (D)	RECUR. EXPEND- ITURE (E)	TOTAL EXPEND- ITURE (D+E) (F)	BALANCE/ DIFFERENC E (C-F) (G)
1.	1,612,408	14,930	1,627,338	343,998	364,996	708,994	918,344
2.	1,597,802	15,035	1,612,837	340,881	394,008	734,889	877,984
3.	1,974,079	36,482	2,010,561	426,808	442,766	869,574	1,140,987
4.	1,805,052	42,574	1,847,626	459,407	480,383	939,790	907,836
5.	1,715,460	40,461	1,755,921	438,980	440,956	879,936	875,985
6.	1,642,279	17,350	1,659,629	350,370	365,118	715,488	944,141
7.	1,772,234	21,571	1,793,805	407,614	438,209	845,823	947,982
8.	1,930,081	24,021	1,954,102	411,771	474,653	886,424	1,067,678
9.	1,486,053	16,347	1,502,400	317,183	330,528	647,711	854,689
10.	1,520,369	18,396	1,538,765	382,191	384,691	766,882	771,883
11.	1,569,389	18,833	1,588,222	393,347	404,997	797,344	790,878
12.	1,513,490	21,189	1,534,679	322,894	383,670	706,564	828,115
13.	1,989,744	25,851	2,015,595	424,500	492,390	916,890	1,098,705
14.	1,515,187	16,585	1,531,772	319,704	374,197	693,901	837,871
15.	1,653,398	22,463	1,675,861	413,350	427,345	840,695	835,166
16.	1, 843, 095	25, 803	1, 868, 898	408, 958	456, 553	86, 511	1, 003, 387
17.	1, 547, 503	1 5, 570	1, 563, 073	330, 150	343, 876	674, 026	889,047
TOTA L	28, 687, 623	393,461	29,081,084	6,491,106	6,999,336	13,490,442	15,590,642

Explanatory Note to Table 3.0:

- (i) Source of data: Field survey (Collected and collated after visits to the LGA's).
- (ii) In 2008 the LGA's received total revenue of N29.08 billion. They made total expenditure of N13.49 billion representing 46.39% of all income, but at the same period left a balance /difference of N15.59 billion (or 53.61%) which was not located or accounted for under any disclosed vote heads.
- (iii) Recurrent revenue includes all income entries under internally generated revenue (IGR), local licences, fees, fines, earnings from commercial ventures, rents, interest payments and miscellany, etc.
- (iv) Capital expenditure involves a total of 20-23 vote heads such as agric and rural development infrastructure projects; social services including education, health, water supply; town planning; staff housing; general administration; information; and transport including roads and bridges, etc.
- (v) Recurrent expenditure includes, generally, staff emoluments, consolidated salaries for the Executive Chairmen, officers and legislators; and maintenance of departments and Units including wages of hired workers, all under 9-13 cote heads.
- (vi) Balance/difference between total revenue (c) and total expenditure (f) includes all funds unexplained under any vote head. Such funds, representing as much as 53.61% of all income, could have been spent in form of security, public relations, responsibility allowances, "settlements" of "God fathers", entertainment, etc. From all the survey data there is no evidence of such funds having been invested in commercial ventures within the period under review, otherwise they would have been reported in the accounting journals.

- d). Providing pipe-borne water supply, sinking of more water boreholes with matching reticulation to deserving communities, opening of more roads and access routes as well as upgrading existing ones and the installation and energization of more electrical lines for adequate power supply, industrialization and economic wellbeing of the people.

It is thus, argued that since the Heads of State (or Presidents) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in succeeding regimes reside in at the Federal Capital, and the governors of the various States reside at their State Headquarters, it is only right and just that the local government Chairmen should constitutionally be made to reside and operate in the headquarters of their respective areas where they are elected to function.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The challenge of service delivery in Nigeria has been an unresolved issue, but the paucity and largely unavailable service dividends to the people look more worrisome because the adverse impact is most felt in the country's rural locations. Providing good adequate socio-economic infrastructure matched with healthcare, quality education and good economic environment, etc has consistently posed a huge challenge to appreciable development efforts in the rural areas of the country. Available data from the present study indicate that less than 50% of funds allocated to the local governments in Enugu State were made use of accordingly, while more than 53% of the funds were disbursed under unexplained vote heads. With all, except one, of the 17 L.G.A. chairmen in Enugu state residing in Enugu capital city from where they shuttled periodically to their areas, the challenges posed by this situation lampooned grossly on any claims of satisfactory service delivery in the L.G.A.'s. From this study, therefore, it is recommended that:

- i. The present constitutional review act by the National Assembly (NASS) should include a provision that a candidate that will emerge (through election) as Chairman of any Local Government Area, by law, has to reside at the L.G. Headquarters or at least in a location within the L.G.A of his/her operation.
- ii. Befitting housing accommodation should, by law, be made available to each succeeding L.G.A. chairman and principal officers to stabilize and get them to deliver as appropriate.
- iii. The budget monitoring and control units of both Federal and State governments should be strengthened and made effective to ensure that reasonable and appreciable service delivery obtain in the rural local government areas both in Enugu State and across the Nigeria federation for a total and holistic development of the rural locations of the country.

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